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## CHILD LABOR AND THE NATION

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BY HON. ALBERT J. BEVERIDGE,

United States Senator from Indiana.

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The purpose of this republic is to make a better type of manhood and womanhood. The reason for free institutions is that they develop nobler human characters than any other institutions develop. The meaning of a democratic form of government is to make people happier and better, and to make life more worth the living. The glory of this Nation is not in the exhaustless fertility of our far flung valleys and plains; not in the amazing wealth of our mines of coal, and iron, and copper and gold; not in our tremendous aggregation of riches; not in our vast network of railways; not in our astounding commerce and trade.

All these are splendid; but these are not the chief sources of our pride. No, the supreme glory of the American people is a pure, clean, independent citizenship—a type of manhood and womanhood, sound of body, clear of mind, stout of heart, aspiring of soul. And to become such a human being as that is the absolute right of every boy and girl under our flag, and any system which prevents any American boy or girl from realizing that ideal is a crime against humanity and treason against liberty itself.

And yet, such a system is in operation this very night. This very night this crime against humanity and free institutions is being committed. As I speak to you, thousands and thousands of little children are at work in cotton mills, in glass factories, in the sweat shop, and, every day, on the breakers of the mines. Their bones are not yet hardened, their muscles still are water, their brains are still the brains of infants. They are in that period which should be the period of the first beginning of their growth, the period when the whole foundation of their life's development should be laid.

And yet, the very materials for that foundation are being forever shattered. Their normal growth is being stopped, their bones

made crooked, their backs bent with the stoop of age, their minds stunted, their characters malformed. Weak nerved, vicious souled, they are being made degenerate by a system of greed, as foolish as it is wicked. For a child to work upon the farm is a good thing if he is not forced to labor beyond his strength. I would even go so far, although many might object to it, as to say, as our honorable President once put it—advocate the teaching of children to work properly as a part of their education. But the child labor which I denounce is the child destroying labor of the factory, the sweat shop and the mines.

This maiming of the bodies of the American children goes forward. This murder of infant characters and souls is being committed, this perversion of citizenship is being done to-night; and in committing their offense against God and man, an even greater crime is committed against free institutions themselves. For child labor is daily pouring into the mass of American citizenship streams of social and political poison which will be fell for ill in this Republic as the decades pass. As these children reach what should be the conditions of maturity, if they have not already been put in their graves, they become unthinking enemies of society—irreclaimable enemies, because the injury that has been done to them can never be undone, nor this cost repaid. When they grow up and compare themselves with other young men and women, they clearly see, and even more keenly feel, that they are inferior—inferior in body, inferior in mind, inferior in soul, not inferior naturally, but made inferior by the slavery of their infancy. They feel that they have been robbed, not robbed of money, not robbed of property; but robbed of intellect, health, character, of life itself. And so they become, all over the land, living engines of wrath against human society itself. When the lords of gold tremble for the safety of their widespread investments, let them remember that child labor is daily creating an element in this republic more dangerous to their physical property itself than ever was packed in dynamiters' bombs.

This danger is not only manifested in incendiary fires, and all the manifestations with which we are so familiar, but it will soon manifest itself in votes to the destruction of the very purposes and reason for which this government of free and equal men was founded.

I think I understand personally exactly how these young men

and women who, as Dr. Adler said, had been exhausted in their youth, feel when they attain manhood. I myself began physical labor earlier than twelve, hard labor—too hard for any child of eighteen or nineteen. But after all, that was in the open air, in the field, beautiful with the waving banners of the corn, and fragrant with the smells of the brown earth, upturned by the ploughshare; it was on the grades of railways with great, gross, rough, but vital and kindly men about me, it was in the logging camps, with the majesty of the woods about me. It was bitter work; it was too heavy for any child, but, after all, over me by day always was the marvelous blue of God's splendid dome or the glory of his clouds, or over me by night the eternal stars kept their sentinel watch and always there was the pure and unpolluted atmosphere to breathe, and through it all, now and then, was the uplifting influence of religion, and finally a college, and then all those influences of the true and the beautiful and the good in life.

And yet, in spite of all that, I do not like to think of the years from twelve to nineteen, because it makes me bitter. But suppose my work had not been in the open air? Suppose it had been in the cotton mills of Georgia, or the sweat shops of New York, or the glass factories of West Virginia, or on the breakers of the mines of Pennsylvania? Suppose I had been forced to breathe the poison and had acquired the low vices and habits which always result from such physical and nervous degeneracy. Even if, as it is, a senseless and unreasoning resentment begins to burn in my breast, what would have been my condition of mind if I had lived the life that the child slaves of America are living to-night?

Our papers contain much resentment if one anarchist is found among our European immigrants. Yet, we are at work creating the same sort. And this not the worst; for these young men and young women, who as children are overworked, through their veins running the poison of an unthinking hatred, become the fathers and mothers of degenerate children. These go to work at the same system that made their parents incapable of having perfect children, made them the ancestors of a race of degenerates. These are the facts. This is the truth, and I say to you to-night, as I have been saying all over this country for the last three months, that this making of possible anarchists and degenerates in America has got to be stopped.

We cannot leave it to the states to stop it. They cannot stop it if they would, and they would not stop it if they could. In the states, for example, where this social disease is most violent, the great manufacturing and mining interests are so powerful that they prevent the passage of any thorough or effective state law, or they do what is a great deal worse, secure the passage of a mutilated law, leading the people to think that their legislature has done all they could, and still the evil goes on. And often, in these states, when a good law is passed, these same interests remain still so powerful with the Executive Department that the law is not executed, and the evil goes on. Even if one state or a dozen states were to pass excellent laws and thoroughly enforce them, not much would be accomplished, because the evil would exist in other states, and still go on. And even if in one, or a dozen states, good laws were still executed, the business man in the good state would be at a disadvantage to the business man in the bad state, because the latter could employ cheap child labor, and the business man in the good state could not employ cheap child labor. And so, by this system of trying to end a national evil by segregated legislation, the very quality of the American citizen is destroyed.

Here, I think, is the generalization which decides what the state should do and what the Nation must do. It is this, when an evil is a national evil, it must be cured by a national remedy. Where the evil is purely local—where it is confined to one state and no other—that state might possibly be left to cure it. For example, if child labor existed in no place in the United States except in Ohio, then we might, perhaps, consider the question of leaving to Ohio herself the curing of this evil. But if child labor is scattered all over the land, if some states are clear of it, and others are foul with it, then it becomes a subject for the combined intelligence and massed morality of American people to handle. And even if every state in the Union but two or three were to remedy the evil effectually, still those two or three states would be pouring streams of bad citizens into the whole Nation, and the whole Nation would be affected by them, because every citizen is a citizen, not of one state only, but the Nation as a whole.

And so we see clearly that this matter cannot be left to the states to handle, first, because they cannot act uniformly, and do not—*never have on any subject*, not on any subject. Second, they

cannot act effectively, even if they were so disposed. Third, where one state acts well, and another state acts ill, the business man in the latter state has the advantage of the business man in the former state. And finally, if there is only one state where the infamous practice is carried on, it is still daily pouring pollution into the whole body of American citizenship.

I have heard it said the past week in conversation on the floor of the senate—it is something I am rather familiar with, after seven years down there—"Let us not be in a hurry about this thing." Let us be in a hurry to pass a currency bill, and in a hurry pass something of that kind, but let the children go. They say, "Well, after a while, in time, the states will all have a uniform law, uniformly executed, by uniformly good, safe and honest governors." Well, if such an impossible day should ever come, we know that it would be a generation from now; and in the meantime, the murder of hundreds of thousands of American children would go on; in the meantime, the character and souls of hundreds of thousands of American children would be ruined; in the meantime, other hundreds of thousands of American children would be forever degenerate—made into engines of wrath, and the parents of still other hundreds of thousands engines of wrath.

Shall this infamy go on? Shall this undermining of the very foundations of free institutions be permitted just to please some well-meaning theorists on the one hand, and some selfish demagogues and millionaires already over-rich with unrighteous wealth on the other hand? Shall the slaughter of the innocents and recruiting of this swelling army of degenerates continue while we endlessly debate, in Congress and elsewhere, the wisdom of curing a national infamy by a national law?

Why, what is this Republic for? What are free institutions for? Why did we ever establish this Nation of liberty? What does the flag mean? What do all these things mean, if they do not mean the making of a splendid race of clean, strong, happy, noble, exalted characterized men and women. The life of one American child, the making of one American citizen is worth one hundred years of academic discussion about the danger of the American people curing national evils through national government.

We hear it said that we are going too far in the curing of national evils by national laws. But isn't the contrary true? Have

we not been straining the other theory in preventing and delaying the nation from remedying the evils of the nation? Why should the barrier of the states be interposed in the national reform of the national evil of child labor? To be sure, that same barrier was raised against the meat inspection bill, but the aroused conscience of the American people swept it away. To be sure, it was raised against the pure food bill, but the American people said that the health and lives of themselves, their wives and their children were more important than some theory which did not affect them.

Last session we passed unanimously the national quarantine law. Its purpose was to protect the ports of our Gulf states, and our Pacific states, from yellow fever and bubonic plague. It was an absolute, unqualified and admitted denial of the rights of those states. For one hundred years each one of them had had its own quarantine laws. And yet, from the very beginning, the practical human folly of it was seen, because if yellow fever is kept out of the ports of one state and let in through the ports of another state, it affects the people of both states and the whole republic, for yellow fever is no respecter of state lines. Yellow fever crosses the boundaries of states without stopping, just as the telegraph and the railroad, and our agencies of good cross state lines without stopping. Very well, if the theory of state rights was yielded by the states that most insisted upon them in order to pass the quarantine law designed to prevent yellow fever which kills possibly twenty people in twenty years, cannot it also yield to the national child labor law to stop that crime which kills and ruins hundreds of thousands of American children every year?

At the great meeting of the Young Men's Christian Association for Western Ohio and Eastern Indiana, held at Richmond, Indiana, a few weeks ago, I formally gave notice that at the beginning of the present session, I would introduce a bill which would cut the heart out of this evil from ocean to ocean, and that, having introduced it, I would fight this session and the next session, and every other session so long as I was in public life until it was passed. I say to you to-night that I have redeemed that pledge. I have introduced that bill, and I repeat to you that I shall fight for it this session as I fought for the meat inspection and pure food bills last session, and will fight the next session, and the session after, if its enemies can for so long delay it, until it shall be passed.

It is a very simple bill, a very brief bill. It provides that the carriers of interstate commerce, the railroads and the steamboat lines, shall not transport the products of any factory or mine that employs or permits the labor of children under fourteen years of age. It provides for any officer of a factory or mine, who violates that act, the punishment of a money fine and a sentence in the penitentiary.

I spoke about the difference between this and the meat bill, and I will confess that I drew them on different theories. I will try to make it clear to you why, although it is a complicated legal question. As a matter of fact, the constitution, which was made for the people and not for the lawyers, is a very simple instrument. And upon that point I wish to say that the American people were not made for the constitution; the constitution was made for the American people. It is our servant; we are not its servants. The difference between the meat inspection bill and this bill is just this, the meat bill goes directly to the evil and says to the packing houses in Illinois, "If your products are intended for interstate commerce, if you are preparing them to ship into another state, that is enough, railroad or no railroad, you must submit to the inspection of these products and the sanitation of these factories by the agents of the American people's national government."

I at first thought of drawing this bill on these lines, and saying, "Be it enacted, that no factory or mine whose products are intended for interstate commerce shall employ children under fourteen years of age," and then providing a fine and penalty. I did not do it, I will frankly say here, in confidence among ourselves—there are only about four thousand of us here and I am sure what I say will not get out—for tactical reasons: first, because it takes hard work to get any of these bills through—we never would have gotten the meat inspection bill through in the world but for that mighty storm of wrath which the revealed facts aroused from ocean to ocean, from Mexico to the Dominion, and even as it was, they pulled nearly all the teeth out of the bill—we got all back but two—and we almost gained those two when we finally passed the bill. I did not follow the strict analogy of the meat bill in the child labor bill, first, because a plausible though not valid constitutional argument could be made against such a bill as that. Second, because I feared that the great factory interests of the south, New Jersey and of Maine, the great



mining interests everywhere, would all combine together and join the great packing interests, and they would not only defeat this bill, but possibly overthrow the meat bill, too.

It will be a hard struggle with the individual interests alone, and I do not particularly care to tackle them in combination with all the other trusts there are in the country at the same time.

The other day in the senate somebody said, "I wonder"—and then looked very profound—"whether the men who drew the interstate commerce clause of the American Constitution ever contemplated any such thing as we are doing?" Why certainly they did not. Read the debates on the interstate commerce clause in the national convention, one hundred and twenty-five years after they were made. I remember Mr. Pinckney, one of the ablest men, said, in discussing this clause, "The interstate commerce clause was designed so that one state would not override the other." He said, "The interests of New England are and always will be rum and fish." He said, "The interests of the Southern states are and always will be cotton and indigo; the great agricultural centers of the country are and always will be New Jersey and Pennsylvania, and New York is the only one that is a manufacturing center that will be affected by free trade." It was under such debates as that that the interstate commerce clause of the American Constitution was formed. But I have always believed that every one of the saving clauses in that instrument, just as I believed that everything else that has occurred in American history was directed from above. And when I have thought about that interstate commerce clause—how it enables the people, who are one people with one flag, to deal with each other, I have felt how true were the words of Emerson in that immortal poem, "The Problem," and how true it was when applied to the interstate commerce clause:

The hand that rounded Peter's dome,  
That crowns the hills of Christian Rome,  
Wrought in a sad sincerity;  
Himself from God he could not free,  
He builded better than he knew.

So this bill, which proposed in a national way to stop this national evil, is so drawn that its entire constitutionality is freely admitted by its foes. It is so simple and effective that both its

friends and enemies alike concede that it will stop the evil in every great factory and mine throughout the entire republic. It is resisted upon the following grounds: First, that perhaps, as a matter of policy, we are going a little too fast and too far in the expansion of national power to the curing of national evils. Second, it is said that the evils of child labor are greatly overdrawn, and as one member of the house the other day said, "This is, after all, only a storm blown up by some of those reformers;" and, third, it is a mighty good thing for the child to have it work.

Now these are the three arguments that are made against this bill. These are the points you will see discussed in the newspapers. These are what you will see in the reports of the debates in Congress. In Washington all the public men are for every reform of every evil—"if it exists," they say. They want to be sure that it "exists," you know.

Many of the worst enemies of reform are apparently *for* it, but *earnestly against any effective method of handling it*. One of the most effective ways of defeating any great reform measure is for its enemies to divide the real friends of the reform into different groups, each earnestly contending as to which is the best of several different methods of curing the evil. It was the favorite tactics of the great Napoleon on the battlefield to so maneuver as to get the armies of the enemy separated into smaller armies, and then subsequently attacking them and defeating them successively. But the legislative Napoleons do better than that. They not only get the real friends of the reform divided into little groups, each sincerely attached to a different method of effecting the reform, but they so maneuver as to get these groups of real friends of the reform *contending among each other*, wasting time, and energy, and strength, instead of uniting for a common cause against a common enemy and achieving a common triumph. And wherever the enemies of a reform have got its friends in that condition their victory is assured.

My friends, the time has come when we have got to get right down to earnest business in this great cause. We have got to appeal to the intelligence, the hearts, the morality of the American people. We have got to arouse and marshal public opinion upon this measure, and when you make such an appeal to the American people they will not fail us, for they never have failed to respond to such

an appeal. And when the American people make their will known to Congress, Congress will act.

There is just one thing that will unfailingly move the American senate, and that is the concentrated and crystallized will of the American people spoken in terms that will not be denied. Oh! these American people—that they shall be increasingly the mightiest power for righteousness and human helpfulness in this world, is the passion of my life. Let us all do what we can to help make them so. We glory in the men of Concord and Valley Forge, and we justly glory in them. Let us then be worthy of their deeds and their memories, and cast from our Nation the body of this death to which it is bound. Only so shall our flag be unsullied; only so shall we indeed be “a people whose god is the Lord;” and only so shall this “government of the people, for the people and by the people” not perish from the earth.